Counterpunch

A Report from the Capital

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The Right to Bear Arms

by Alexander Cockburn

Even as Clinton administration officials at one end of the State Department were grinding out mid-June press releases about the nightmare of nuclear proliferation in North Korea, their colleagues down the hall were mustering every last ounce of grim reserve to battle the greatest nightmare of all: a formal ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague that possession of nuclear weaponry is in itself a criminal enterprise.

Nothing engenders more fear and loathing in the hearts of the nuclear powers than the specter of such a ruling. Among the dread precedents are the Geneva Protocol of 1925 outlawing chemical and biological warfare or, even earlier, the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907, inspired by Czar Nicholas II, limiting the use of dum-dum bullets and asphyxiating gases.

As the nuclear powers recall, such early initiatives ultimately engendered prohibitions like the Chemical Convention — signed in 1993 by 130 nations — outlawing the possession as well as the use of gas.

Of course, if it ever came to a nuclear crunch, legal pronouncements by the World Court would not inhibit the leader of the free world from dropping Big Ones by the hundred. But a ruling by the Court would be a shot across the bows of the present arms "reduction" posture of the U.S., namely an unending paddle toward the distant mirage of a Comprehensive Test Ban, plus renewal of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, which sanctions permanent division between the nuclear haves and have-nots, and legitimizes the special status of the nuclear weapons states.

Outlawing of nuclear weapons by the International Court of Justice would raise the issue of abolition. The nuclear powers still shudder at Ronald Reagan's flirtation with abolition in Reykjavik in 1986. They see all too clearly the consequences of criminalization: mounting world pressure for negotiations towards a nuclear arms convention, with campaigns promoting a universal, non-discriminatory prohibition of atomic weapons.

Two of the nuclear powers — France and the United Kingdom — have an added incentive to battle the criminalizers. Their present status as permanent members of the U.N. Security Council depends in large part on possession of nuclear weapons. Without such armament, there would be unflattering analysis of their real status as second-tier states, ending in humiliating expulsion from the Council.

For the past two years the World Court Project — mounted by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, the International Peace Bureau and the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms — has been working towards getting the Court to issue an advisory opinion on the legal status of nuclear weapons under existing

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The NED Files

Since being created by the Reagan administration in 1983, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has frequently adopted strange methods to advance freedom abroad. These include funnelling money to Gen. Manuel Noriega's hand-picked candidate in Panama's fraudulent 1984 presidential election — Noriega was then a valued CIA asset, not the deranged drug pusher he became after falling out with the Reaganites a few years later — and providing financial support in 1985 to right-wing paramilitary groups in France, one of the world's oldest democracies.

A 1987 internal memorandum, sent anonymously to ***Counterpunch***, reveals another example of NED intrigue: funding of a group in Suriname committed to the violent overthrow of the constituted government — a direct violation of NED guidelines. The case is also important because top NED officials, including current President Carl Gershman, apparently withheld this damaging information from the public.

NED's loony Cold Warriors used money authorized by Congress to run their own private foreign policy.

Tiny Suriname (population, 400,000) briefly rocketed to media fame in the early-1980s, when Lt. Col. Desi Bouterse took power in a military coup. Though initially enjoying broad support, Bouterse proved to be an unethical ruler and his government was guilty of serious human rights violations.

Bouterse's fatal error was neither corruption nor thuggery — these being s.o.p. of U.S. allies in Latin America — but his desire to maintain warm relations with Cuba and Libya. Conservatives howled with outrage. Jeane Kirkpatrick, *The Wall Street Journal* and Freedom House demanded swift action to prevent the establishment of a "Libyan beachhead" in the Western Hemisphere.

Such action was entirely amenable to the CIA, which in 1983 was approached by a group of exiles from Suriname who were seeking support for a coup against Bouterse. In *Turmoil and Triumph*, George Shultz's memoirs, the former Secretary of State says Agency officials proposed posting a squad of South Korean commandos in Venezuela, from where they would topple Bouterse in a lightning strike.

Congress put a halt to the CIA's plan, which Shultz dubbed a "harebrained scheme." Then Sen. Barry Goldwater reportedly called the CIA's plotting in Suriname "the dumbest fucking idea I ever heard of in my life."

It was not too dumb, however, for the NED. With the CIA shut out, the Endowment, presumably with Reagan administration approval, became the primary instrument of anti-Bouterse policy. Between 1984 and 1985, it granted at least $150,000 to exiled opposition groups, with most of the money going to the Dutch-based Council for the Liberation of Suriname (CLS).

An Endowment annual report from the period says the Council, which was dominated by wealthy conservatives, would "document and publicize [Bouterse's] violations of human and civil rights." But the CLS used at least part of its NED funding to produce literature, for distribution in Suriname, which sought support for the Jungle Commando, a guerilla group led by Ronnie Brunswijk, Bouterse's one-time bodyguard.

(Brunswijk, who began his rebellion after being fired in a pay dispute, was not as ruthless as Bouterse but was hardly a model democrat. "The guerrillas had their attractive side but were generally looking for a piece of the action rather than acting on high moral principles," recalls Larry Birns of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs.)

Endowment officials were alarmed by the CLS's *overt* support for Brunswijk. On Feb. 23, 1987, Adrian Karatnycky of the AFL-CIO's Free Trade Union Institute (FTUI), one of four "core groups" that receives and distributes NED money, passed a copy of the Council's pro-Commando pamphlet to Tom Kahn, now deceased but then the AFL-CIO's director of international affairs. "Inasmuch as [the pamphlet] openly calls for the military overthrow of the Bouterse regime it is technically in violation of NED provisos against advocacy of violent change," said a note Karatnycky attached to the publication. "Should Gene [Eugenia Kemble of the FTUI] check this out? Maybe she already has?"

The response from Kahn: "I believe Carl [Gershman] is aware (scared) of this, so I assume Gene is also aware (if not scared). Anyway, you might inquire of her (in my name) if there's any flak flying."

Translation: We broke our own rules. Let's make sure our asses are covered.

The memo starkly reveals how the NED's loony Cold Warriors use money authorized by Congress — which in this case had barred U.S. support for the type of anti-Bouterse activities being promoted with Endowment funds — to run their own private foreign policy. The document is all the more significant because it came two years after the NED's funding of French right-wingers was exposed. At that time, Gershman —who, like Karatnycky, failed to return phone calls requesting information on the Suriname affair — made a vow of openness and promised that all "sensitive" projects would be made public.

Incidentally, Bouterse was swept from power after agreeing to hold elections in late 1987. NED meddling played no role in his downfall.

Footnote: In late-June, Rep. Joel Hefley (R-Colo.), with a 92 percent rating from the American Conservative Union, introduced an amendment to kill the NED. A similar amendment passed in the House last fall, but a fierce lobbying blitz, led by the Clinton administration and Sens. Ted Kennedy, Tom Harkin and Paul Wellstone, saved the Endowment. Unlike the NED's liberal friends, Hefley says the NED's history shows it to be beyond redemption. •

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Arms, from p. 1

law. The U.N. General Assembly has repeatedly declared that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons would be a violation of international law and a crime against humanity. But the precise status of nuclear weapons — which the nuclear powers have, regardless of threats or use — is an unresolved matter.

The Project has met with considerable success, nowhere more than in the momentous May 1993 victory, when member nations of the World Health Organization (WHO) debated whether to ask the World Court for an opinion on nuclear weapons. Despite the frantic arm-twisting of the nuclear powers, the WHO decided that it should do so. Secret ballots were decisive in outflanking procedural blocking maneuvers.

Accordingly, Hiroshi Nakajima, director general of the WHO, transmitted an official request to the Court, which set a June 20, 1994 deadline for written submissions from member states. The deadline has just been extended to September 20. The process is protracted. Next June comes the deadline for commentary by states on submissions lodged by next September.

After the shock of the WHO's vote in May 1993, the nuclear powers faced the awful possibility of an equivalent vote in the U.N. General Assembly, based on a resolution introduced by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Scenes of fragrant roguery duly followed. Chairing the NAM in the fall of last year was Indonesia. If there is one message that the U.S. and Britain have striven to inculcate in recent times, it has been the futility of crude arm-twisting of the proud generals in Jakarta on the matter of their genocidal invasion of East Timor. Time and again, U.S. and U.K. officials have stressed the need for decorum and quiet diplomacy, along with the utter uselessness of trade sanctions.

In the fall of 1993 this idiom was abruptly abandoned, and Indonesia's chain was given a peremptory yank. The U.S., France and Britain threatened Jakarta with limited trade sanctions. Within an amazingly brief space of time, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas assured the Western nuclear powers that Indonesia was withdrawing its previously stated support for the resolution and that the matter would not come to a vote. This was the same Alatas who had previously lectured the West on Indonesia's independent foreign policy and its "right" to act in East Timor as it pleased.

This June 17, the State Department disclosed that it had advised the World Court in writing that the Court lacked jurisdiction in the matter of the legality of nuclear weapons, since it had not been within the mandate of the WHO to ask for an opinion. This is transparent nonsense, since the WHO has a long history of involvement in the health and environmental consequences of nuclear weapons.

No doubt aware of this weakness, the State Department added that if the Court should nonetheless decided to provide an opinion, the U.S. position is that nothing in international law prohibits the use of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, "while the fundamental principles of international law of armed conflict would apply to the use of nuclear weapons," determination of whether a particular use would violate these principles would have to be made on a case-by-case basis, depending "in each instance on the specific circumstances of the situation."

Such were the words being written with presumably straight faces by U.S. officials thundering their fears at the North Korean menace. •

From Madman to Our Man to Amen

The Washington Post's dutiful recording of evolving White House reaction to abatement of the North Korea crisis made for entertaining reading. On June 16, Jimmy Carter announced privately to the White House and publicly to CNN that there had been a breakthrough. Kin Il Sung would agree to freeze his nuclear program. The U.S. would cease to press for sanctions. There would be inspections.

June 18 brought a *Post* piece by R. Jeffrey Smith and Bradley Graham relaying the White House's initial reaction, namely that Carter was mad. "Officials were privately scathing that the former Democratic President would so embarrass his successor by challenging his policy at a highly sensitive moment...'Carter is hearing what he wants to hear, both from Kim Il Sung and from the Administration. He is creating his own reality,' said a senior US official."

By June 21, the White House had gone into modified rehab with Smith and Ann Devroy reporting that the Clinton Administration was "scrambl[ing] to find a fresh strategy" after Carter's visit had "derailed a U.S. drive for economic sanctions."

Five days later the transition was completed and the strategy — Jimmy Carter's — triumphantly relabelled. Smith and Devroy reported on June 26 that the White House had taken "Kim's limited and somewhat vague pledge to Carter...transforming it into a more concrete and slightly wider North Korean promise to put on hold its most worrisome nuclear activities." Thus did the White House defuse the fearsome crisis of appearing to have its foreign policy managed by a retired peanut broker. The actual strategy was precisely on terms announced by Kim Il Sung last year. — A.C.

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Shorts/Updates

In a new display of foreign policy know-how, the Clinton administration reportedly wants to nominate William Doherty, head of the AFL-CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), as ambassador to Guyana. A sinister figure mentioned on several previous occasions in these pages, Doherty was termed a "career CIA agent" by Philip Agee. The organization he heads supported coups in Brazil, Chile and Guatemala.

In the early 1960s, Doherty's AIFLD funnelled CIA funds to right-wing trade unions in Guyana to destabilize the government of Cheddi Jagan, a popularly-elected Marxist. Opposition groups also used AIFLD's money to incite terrorism and racial violence between East Asian and African communities. The ensuing political chaos helped push Jagan from office in 1964.

Now 76, Jagan returned to power in elections held two years ago. An official from his administration told the Inter Press Service that Doherty's "well-known subversive activities" made his nomination unacceptable. "We are not going to stand for it," said the official. "He's not coming here."

According to sources, AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland pressed Clinton to make the nomination. Kirkland reportedly wants to merge AIFLD and its African counterpart, the African American Labor Center, a step Doherty opposes. Exiling the AIFLD official to sunnier climes was the solution Kirkland arrived at to break the resistance to the reorganization plan.

Since recipient governments generally can veto nominations, Doherty will likely remain in the U.S. and the AFL-CIO chief will be forced to seek other remedies for his bureaucratic problems.

The debate over welfare reform dodders on, dominated by cabinet officials, members of Congress, technocrats and others who generally have no understanding of the issue. As Roxie Nicholson, a Labor Department employee, recently told *The Washington Post*, the push for reform is spearheaded by "white men who don't even know poor people."

Given the debate's participants, the solutions proposed are entirely predictable. Conservative writer Charles Murray demands that children of single mothers on welfare be placed in orphanages. Says Rep. Rick Santorum (R-Penn.), who maintains that there are plenty of jobs—and apparently day care—for the motivated poor: "I've been balancing [work and family] for the last four years of my life in Congress...We should expect no less from moms on welfare."

The biggest welfare fraud, though, is Rep. Tom DeLay of Texas, co-chair of the Republican welfare task force and an advocate of two-years-and-out reform. "Whenever you give somebody something for nothing in return, you own a piece of those people," he recently told the press. "You're robbing them of their human dignity."

Judging from the imprecise figures provided on his financial disclosure statement, this profound observer of the welfare scene has net assets of approximately $500,000. DeLay's annual salary of $133,600 is supplemented with a health care benefits package worth about $400 per month. The congressman pays only one-quarter of that amount, with taxpayers shelling out the additional $300 — that being almost double the amount that a single parent with two children receives in monthly welfare benefits from DeLay's state of Texas.

Not content with this level of compensation, DeLay last March unsuccessfully fought to strip from House campaign finance reform legislation provisions which restrict lobbyists from giving gifts to members of Congress. DeLay argued that by banning gifts, the House would feed the "perception" that members were for sale.

That he is a leading Congressional recipient of lobbyist-provided freebies probably played a larger role in helping DeLay define his position. Between 1986 and 1990, the congressman took in $123,150 in honoraria from groups like The Tobacco Institute, British Petroleum and the American Nuclear Energy Council. Delay is also a frequent Congressional junketeer, last year accepting eight all expense paid trips funded by private interests. Included here was a five-day visit to Paris, compliments of pharmaceutical manufacturer Rhone-Poulenc.

Apparently, maintaining one's dignity when receiving something for nothing is easier for DeLay than it is for those horrible welfare cheats.

The news out of the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) late-May meeting in Puerto Vallerta, Mexico focused on the establishment of a sanctuary in Antarctica where commercial whaling will be permanently barred. Since a world-wide ban on commercial whaling was approved in 1986, the sanctuary's creation is largely a symbolic gesture.

Completely overlooked in U.S. press accounts was the IWC's support for the Norwegian- and U.S.-backed Revised Management Scheme (RMS). As discussed in issue #11 of ***Counterpunch***, the RMS — warmly endorsed by the Environmental Vice President (EVP), Al Gore — takes the first step towards setting kill quotas for whales in the northern seas, where populations have been most dramatically reduced.

The London *Observer* reported that Oslo was "relatively happy" with the outcome at Puerto Vallerta. "We hope to have a commercial whaling quota in the northeast Atlantic within two years," Norway's IWC commissioner, Karsten Klepsvik, told the newspaper, in what is almost certainly an overly optimistic assessment.

Oslo must also be cheered by recent declarations from U.S. officials who say the Clinton administration will probably not impose sanctions on Norway despite its unilateral defiance of the IWC's whaling ban. Having approved the harpooning of 157 minke whales last year, Oslo in early June increased the 1994 kill quota to 189.

For the record, ***Counterpunch*** believes that mainstream environmentalists often promote naive and simplistic eco-policies. For example, many U.S. ecologists would happily turn the Amazon rain forest region into an enormous wildlife preserve, ignoring the fact that the jungle is home to roughly 15 million mostly poor people in Brazil alone.

But Norway is one of the world's richest nations and whaling plays an insignificant role in its economy. U.S. support for Oslo is only the latest example of the marginal influence mainstream environmental groups wield with Clinton and EVP Gore. •

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